

HIV/AIDS: The Creative Challenge

Engaging culture and creativity in HIV/AIDS prevention

Case study: Tsha Tsha TV series

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TSHA TSHA

- Is an entertainment education television drama series commissioned by SABC 1 Education
- Produced by CADRE and Curious Pictures
- Additional support is provided by Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa and Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Centre for Communications Programs
- Support to various phases of the series has been provided by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- Series comprises 78 episodes (4 series) broadcast between 2003 and 2006



OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT OF THE SERIES

- The drama series focuses on young people and dealing with love, sexuality and relationships in a world affected by HIV/AIDS
- Set in the small fictional rural town of Lubusi in the Eastern Cape
- Series explores many of the challenges facing young people in South Africa today and aims to enhance their capacity to reflect on problems, engage in developing solutions and to become active agents in crafting the circumstances of their own lives



TARGET AUDIENCE

- Intended audience was South African youth aged 18-24 (series 1, 2, 3)
- Intended audience was expanded to 18-35 for series 4
- Although produced for youth audience, series drew viewers across age and language groups
- Received audience share of about 50% for the broadcast timeslot
- Recent survey estimated that about 14 million viewers – around half of all South Africans aged 15 years and older, had watched the series, many being regular viewers



SERIES METHODOLOGY

- Focuses on creative, insightful and collaborative problem-solving in limit-situations.
- Based more on deepening of insight about problem issues than provision of information or delivery of messages.
- Education themes or lessons are embedded in story and unravel in the context of dramatic events.
- Problem situations are encountered and tackled in a gradual, realistic way.



SERIES METHODOLOGY

- A ball-room dancing club provides a metaphoric background for exploring relationships and intimacy.
- Fantasy, humor and entertaining secondary characters provide dramatic relief and entertainment value.
- Drama promotes reflection and psychological insight as characters discover their shadows and struggle to find meaningful ways of engaging with the world.



KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Identification:** whereby emphasis is placed on the psychological depth of characters with a view to allowing audience members to relate to personality traits, circumstances and challenges on both emotional and intellectual levels.
- **Problem-solving:** Established ways of thinking about problems is critically examined, and multiple paths to solutions are explored. It is recognised that problems do not always have simple solutions.
- **Self-efficacy:** This includes exploring strategies for coping with challenges, developing self-esteem and confidence in the ability to exercise control over ones life.



KEY PRINCIPLES

- ***Living humanely:*** This involves recognising the value of empathy, co-operation and collaboration with others, and is promoted in contrast to individualism.
- ***Lessons rather than messages:*** Tsha Tsha avoids promoting simplified solutions to problems, including avoiding closed-ended didactic messaging. Instead, the focus is on lessons that are seen as a process including reflections on choices, consequences and multiple pathways of action occurring over extended periods of time.
- ***Challenging norms, conventions & stereotypes:*** The world is framed by codes and norms that may need to be challenged, before problems can be effectively addressed.



KEY PRINCIPLES

- ***Limit situations:*** Problems are complex, and solutions are often not simple because contexts may limit the choices that can be made. Creativity is often required for effective solutions, and problems may need to be approached from many different perspectives.
- ***Understanding change:*** Change is seen as a process that is dependent on experiences, relationships, and frames of reference. Sustainable changes are generally made up of small step-wise changes.
- ***Naming/showing things:*** Ideas, practices and social activities are brought into being by naming, and this allows the audience to identify and address problems eg. the red ribbon symbol was used to acknowledge Andile's mother's death from AIDS.



HIV/AIDS ISSUES IN TSHA TSHA

- HIV-related stigma
- Disclosure
- Community support for PLWAs
- Challenges of young people
- Caring for sick parents
- Condom use
- Secondary abstinence
- VCT
- Sexual assault



HIV/AIDS ISSUES IN TSHA TSHA

- Financial & social risks associated of HIV/AIDS on families
- Child-headed households
- Confronting possibility of being HIV positive/being tested
- Learning to live with HIV/AIDS
- Challenges of adopting HIV prevention behaviours e.g. condom use, secondary abstinence, faithfulness, partner reduction
- Related themes include: unemployment, negative coping strategies such as alcohol abuse, parent-child relationships



SERIES DEVELOPMENT & CULTURAL APPROACH

- Involved researching and creating a credible, coherent and appealing dramatic context through understanding the stories & realities of a small rural town in the Eastern Cape
- Tensions between entertainment and education values needed to be creatively balanced throughout the development and production process
- Involved ongoing testing of developing script through focus groups with young people in JHB and Peddie
- Story was tested for cultural and social authenticity, relevance, likeability, interest and response
- Comments included expectations of characters, what was jarring/inconsistent & what was being conveyed by the drama



SERIES DEVELOPMENT & CULTURAL APPROACH

- Focus groups were also conducted with people living with HIV/AIDS and health workers to check the script from the perspective of their specific experience
- Where culture or tradition was a focus within a storyline, these were extensively tested for authenticity, realism and relevance
- Scripts were translated into Xhosa in language workshops and then tested with focus groups to assess responses to the translations. Preferred way of sub-titling the series was also tested during post production
- Additional technical expert review was provided by CADRE and by JHHESA



SERIES IMPACT

- Evaluation incorporated a complex of qualitative and quantitative approaches including conducting research at various points over the duration of the series
- This allowed for comparative understanding of initial and changing perceptions of the series, as well as for HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitudes, practices
- Quantitative data confirmed that watching the drama has significant effects on attitudes and behaviour commitment related to HIV/AIDS
- Regression and propensity score analysis allowed for quantification of viewer identification with characters. Use of this method has contributed to expanding approaches to evaluation of similar entertainment education products



SERIES IMPACT

- Qualitative evaluative components suggest South Africans have a highly developed level of visual literacy and are interested in and accepting of the concept of integrating learning with drama
- There is clear evidence that the drama is emotionally captivating, that there is strong identification with characters, and strong concern with their plight
- Seen as realistic and based on real-life situations. Also seen as inspirational, particularly in relation to portraying hope in the face of adversity (unemployment, poverty, disease).



SERIES IMPACT

- Tsha Tsha contributed to increased knowledge and general awareness about HIV/AIDS. Self-reported shifts in HIV attitudes, beliefs, practices and behaviours reflect development of greater understanding, tolerance, empathy and caring about people living with HIV/AIDS.
- This was matched with indications of an increased sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the self and others.
- Shifts towards positive/empowering values, attitudes and behaviours were not limited to the context of HIV/AIDS but extended into other areas such as relationships (friendships, parental, sexual), poverty and social problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, crime, violence and unemployment



SERIES IMPACT

- Concept of lessons informed problem-solving skills and were often applied to participants' own situations.
- Series evaluations have been further confirmed by a recent national HIV/AIDS communication survey in South Africa
- Findings included that: among people who had seen Tsha Tsha and those who had not (i) reported condom use at last sex was 6.5% more likely; (ii) discussing an HIV test with a partner was 5% more likely; (iii) helping someone sick with AIDS was 5.5% more likely; and (iv) having positive attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS was 7.9% more likely



DISSEMINATION OF TSHA TSHA

- A Facilitator's Guide was developed for use in non-broadcast environments to facilitate debate & discussion.
- Tsha Tsha educational materials freely available and include series 1, 2, 3, and 4; a 20-minute compilation of series 1; evaluation reports
- Tsha Tsha has been successfully used as part of an HIV/AIDS communication strategy with diverse groups including: students at higher education institutions; at correctional centres; FBOs, NGOs, CBOs; youth groups and at schools



LESSONS

- Importance of having a well developed conceptual framework
- Guiding principles serve a vital function for developers of educational and dramatic content
- Ongoing research and evaluation seen as natural part of the development of a television drama series, and not a separate activity that takes place at the end
- Depiction of realistic characters and storylines – showing the world and how complex it is, rather than a fictional world

